THE SPRING CROP TOMATO SUPPLY SITUATION

M. E. Cravens

and

J. E. Jeffries

Department of Agricultural Economics
and Rural Sociology

Ohio Agricultural Experiment Station
Wooster, Ohio

and the

Ohio State University
Columbus, Ohio

A. E. 343 April 1963

The Spring Crop Tomato Supply Situation

CONTENTS

Summary and Conclusions on 1963 Outlook

The 1963 spring tomato crop potential as seen in mid-March is even more uncertain and at the same time larger than usual. With favorable weather from now through May in Florida and Texas, tomato shipments will be considerably larger and will continue later in the season than during the last two years. This would mean that heavy shipments from Florida would continue throughout the month of May and to mid-June while shipments from Texas would continue heavy from late May throughout June.

Of particular interest is the fact that the vine-ripe tomato crop has had an increase from 2790 acres in 1960-61 to 3500 for this season. More important to greenhouse growers is the fact that only about 30 acres of the 1961 spring vine-ripe crop started harvest after March 20 while almost 1000 acres of the 1963 crop will have its first picking after March 20. This will put a major portion of the vine-ripe harvest during the greenhouse season,--again, weather permitting.

Fortunately for greenhouse tomato growers, ideal weather seldom prevails. Unseasonably hot or wet or dry weather frequently speeds up the harvest, reduces its length, or cuts the total quantity harvested. Only time will tell whether the 1963 crop will come up to its potential. If it should, the Ohio greenhouse industry will have more competition than at any period in the past four years. Success in meeting this competition will depend in large measure on the degree to which the industry convinces chain and wholesale buyers that greenhouse tomatoes are superior to the shipped product and on the service which it gives these buyers.

Even in a market as competitive as the 1963 spring tomato crop seems certain to be, the individual buyer-merchandiser has some discretion in the

product that he features. If he is convinced that his customers prefer greenhouse tomatoes over competing tomatoes, and if the greenhouse suppliers keep him well stocked he will have less reason to feature Florida or Texas tomatoes. If, on the other hand, the buyer is given any reason for a change he will find someone ready to encourage him in making it. Mistakes of any kind are much more costly to the seller during such a fiercely competitive period. Preplanning, preselling, sales, and sales follow-through will be much more important than usual.

The Spring Crop Tomato Supply Situation

M. E. Cravens - J. E. Jeffries

Florida, 1963 Season

Transplanting of the 1963 spring tomato crop in Florida is completed. Growers in this area had 22,800 acres growing as of April 6, 1963 compared with 18,190 acres at this time last year. Of this, 12,890 acres are in the pre-harvest stage, compared with the 10,370 acres for the same date in 1962. This is a 24 percent increase over last year. Plantings for 1963 increased over last year particularly during the period since the freeze in mid-December (Charts 1 & 2). Reports indicate that most of the freeze damaged plants lived even though they were set back. The overall pattern of production for 1963 would appear more similar to that for 1960 than for any other recent year.

Shipments from January 1 through March 2 ran much below last season, but starting with the week ending March 2 shipments have been equal to or higher than they were for the same week last season. Most shipments so far have been from the vine-ripe and Dade county areas.

Vine-Ripes - Production has passed the peak. Supplies should decline gradually over the next several weeks as more fields go out of production. Size and quality have generally been good this season.

Dade County - Shipments are dropping off as more fields go out of production. A fair supply of tomatoes will continue for several weeks from this area.

Fort Pierce - Harvest just beginning. Crop in good condition.

Chart 1. Weekly Plantings of Florida Tomatoes*
1960, 1962, and 1963 Spring Crops

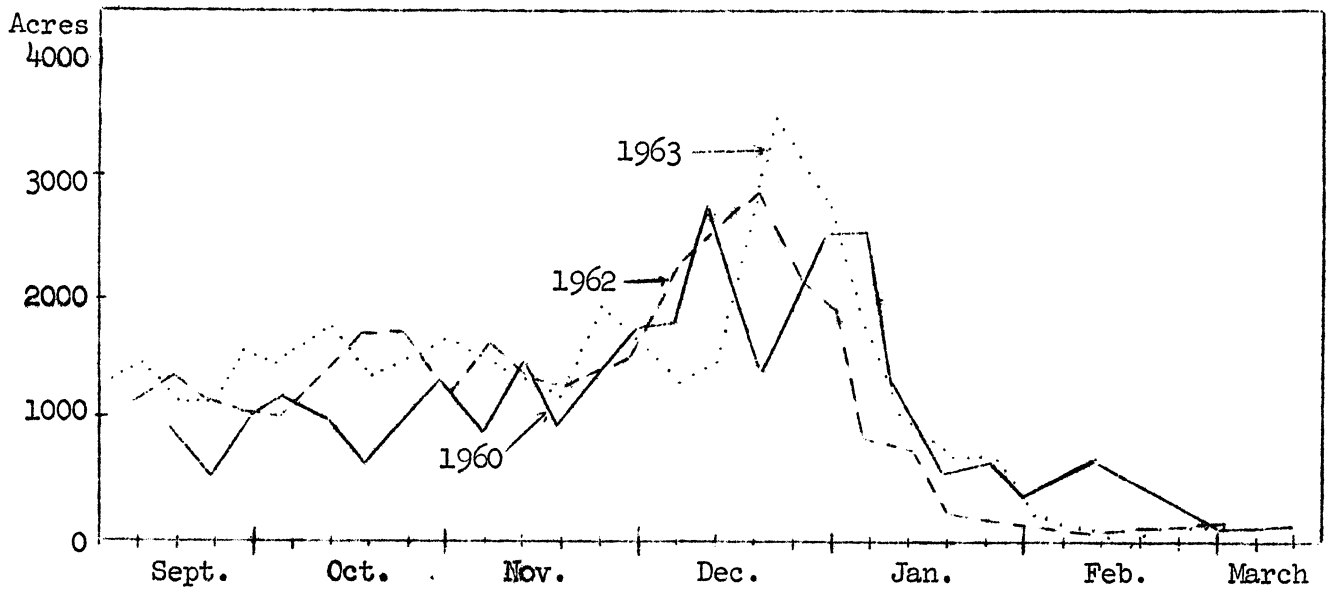
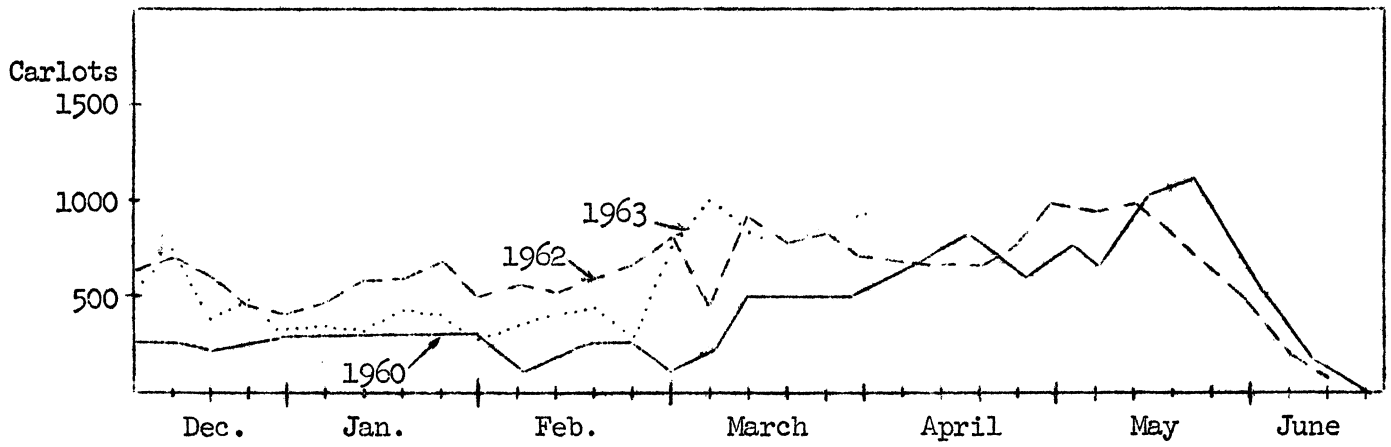


Chart 2. Weekly Shipments of Florida Tomatoes*
1960, 1962, and 1963 Seasons



*U.S.D.A. Statistical Reporting Service, Orlando, Florida

Fort Myers-Immokalee - Harvest slowed by poor market. Peak harvest expected in late April. Crop conditions average.

Manatee-Ruskin-Wauchula - Crop has been held back by cool temperatures, wind, and lack of rainfall. Fruit is setting well. Harvest can be expected to begin about mid-April. Peak shipments will come in May.

North Central - Crop in fair to good condition. No harvest can be expected from this area before May.

Texas

The Rio Grande Valley of Texas had 18,750 acres in the growing stage on April 6, 1963 compared with 15,900 acres a year ago. The increase in acreage over last year is 24 percent. Planting and replanting is complete. Unfavorable weather conditions during February and March has caused some poor stands and slow growth and current drought conditions are hurting fruit development. It appears the 1963 crop will be later than usual. Harvest usually starts before May 1 but the first 1963 harvest seems likely to occur about mid-May.

Mexico

Shipments will become lighter in April but can be expected to continue throughout the month. Shipments limited because of low prices.

FLORIDA AND TEXAS ACREAGE INVENTORY*
AS OF APRIL 9, 1963 WITH COMPARISONS

AREA	Acres for Harvest	Stage of Development of Acreage Growing or in Harvest: Pre-Fruit Set	Fruit Set	Harvest Begin 2 Weeks	Harvesting: Number Times Picked: One	Two	3 or more	Harv'd to date
FLORIDA								
Vine-Ripe	4090	90	100	110	190	310	2400	890
Dade	19680	280	60	160	1250	3200	1500	13230
Ft. Pierce	7190	420	2630	870	-	-	-	3270
Immokalee	7110	180	1670	1240	920	140	-	2960
Manatee	5130	340	3690	110	-	-	-	980
North Central	940	440	500	-	-	-	-	-
1962-63 Total	44130	1750	8650	2490	2360	3650	3900	21330
1961-62 Total	41520	890	1490	7990	2380	2020	3420	23330
TEXAS 1962-63	17800	17650	150	-	-	-	-	-
TEXAS 1961-62	15900	13800	2100	-	-	-	-	-

*U.S.D.A. Statistical Reporting Service, Orlando, Florida

Trends in Competition for Greenhouse Tomatoes

Generally, the most critical time in the competition of other spring crop tomatoes for greenhouse tomatoes is the latter half of May and the first half of June. This is the peak season of shipments for Ohio greenhouse tomatoes. Until 1958 tomato shipment from Florida generally dropped off rapidly by the middle of May. Since 1958 there have been significant shipments each year in May and June although none have since reached the 1958 levels. Both time and rate of plantings and weather have affected this trend. (Charts 3 & 4)

A major competitor of the greenhouse tomato during the April-May period is the vine-ripe tomato. It is here that the greatest increases have occurred in later plantings and harvest since comparative data were first available in 1961. Less than 2 percent of the spring crop acreage was picked for the first time after March 9 in 1961 while in 1963 about 30 percent was yet to be picked for the first time on March 9. It is evident that the Florida tomato grower, and particularly the vine-ripe

Chart 3. Weekly Plantings of Tomatoes * - Florida and Texas, 1962 Spring Crop

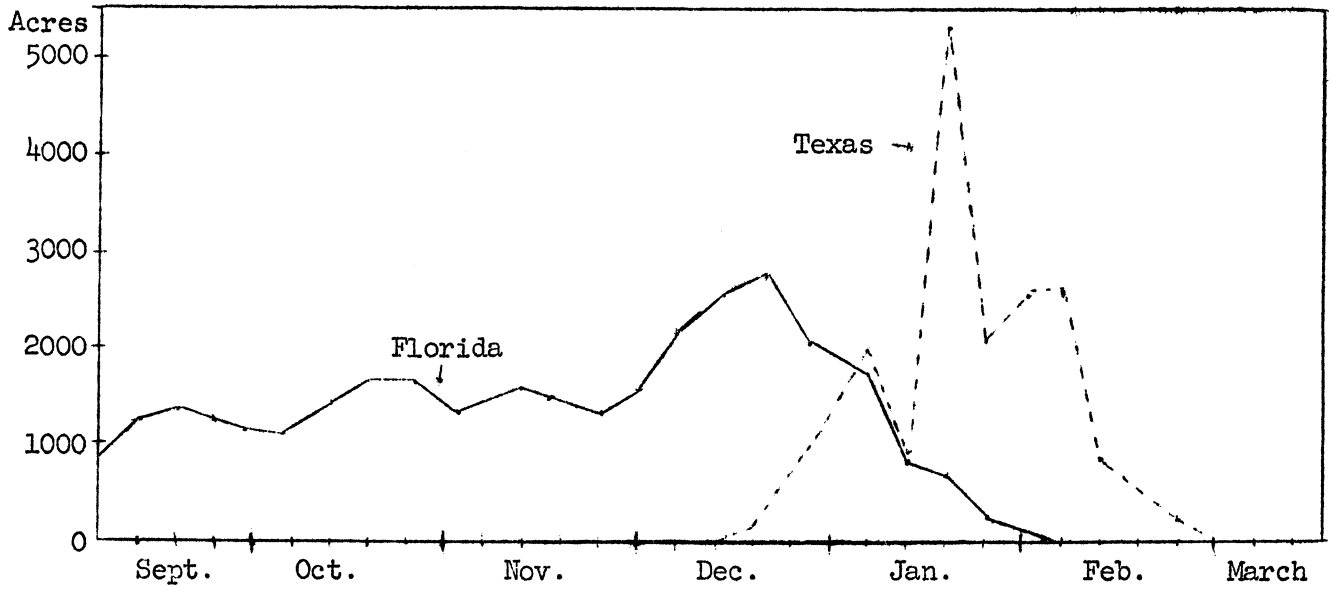
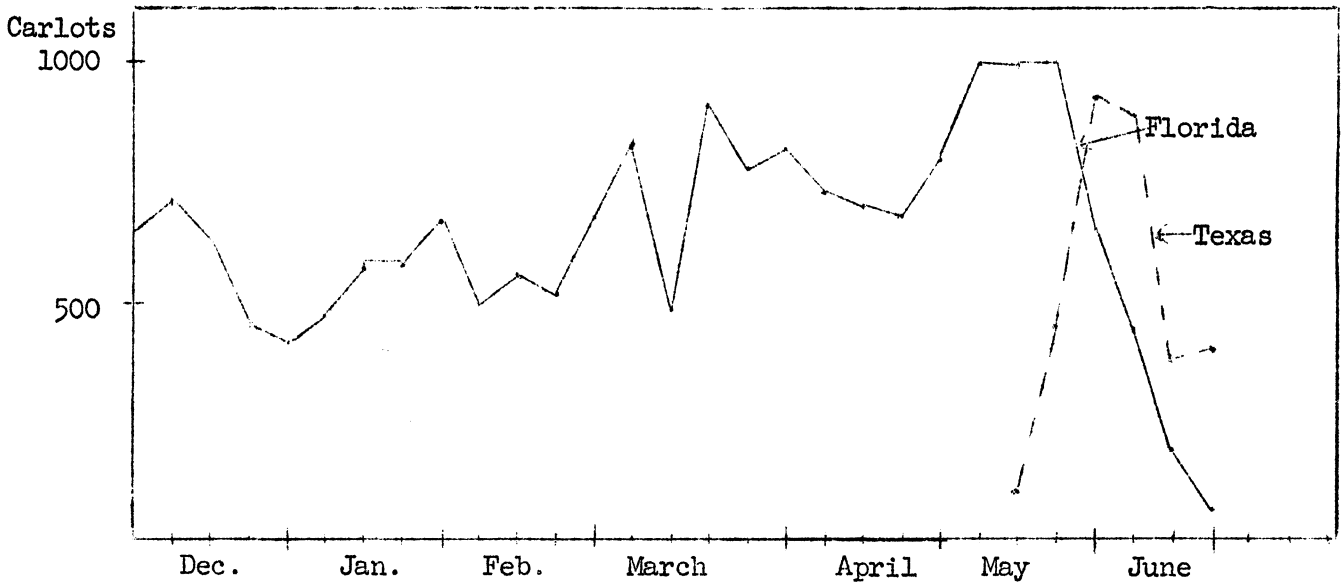


Chart 4. Weekly Shipments of Tomatoes *, Florida and Texas, 1962 Spring Crop



*U.S.D.A. Statistical Reporting Service, Orlando, Florida

WEEKLY SHIPMENTS OF FLORIDA AND TEXAS TOMATOES,*
MAY 1 - JUNE 30, 1958, 1959, 1960, 1961, 1962, CARLOT EQUIVALENTS

Month	Week	1958	1959	1960	1961	1962
			Florida			
May	1	568	885	729	1154	997
	2	848	848	1002	1005	953
	3	801	454	1159	747	982
	4	989	515	835	349	657
June	1	1095	202	545	257	442
	2	754	144	172	51	189
	3	359	18	38	11	64
	4	86	1	6	2	0
Sub-Total		5500	3067	4486	3576	4284
			Texas			
May	1			25	366	62
	2			29	558	334
	3			120	652	793
	4			258	422	899
June	1			378	450	484
	2			442	251	500
	3			355	36	190
	4			118	27	18
Sub-Total				1725	2762	3280
TOTAL				6211	6338	7564

* U.S.D.A. Statistical Reporting Service, Orlando, Florida

Chart 5. Weekly Plantings of Tomatoes* - Florida and Texas, 1963 Spring Crop

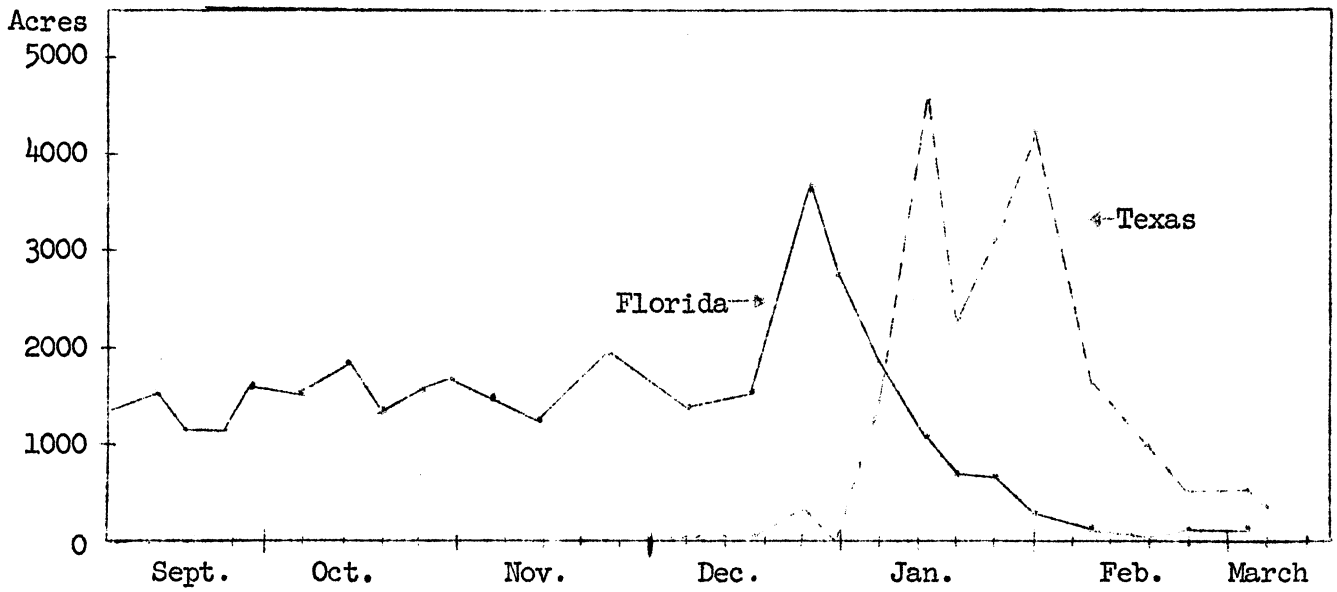
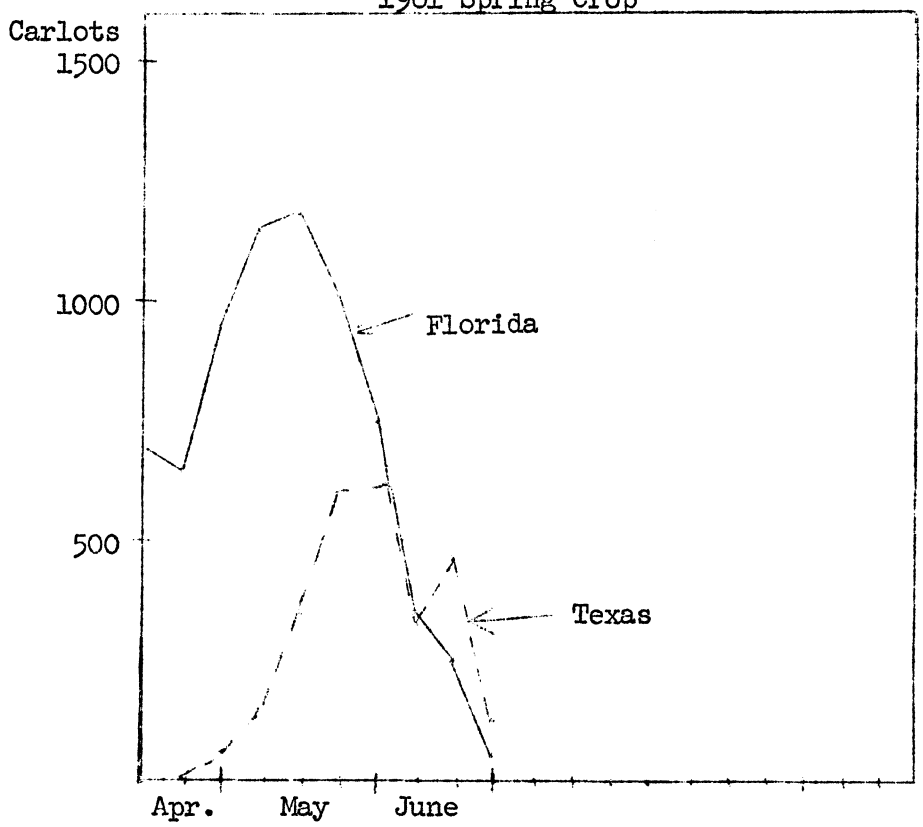


Chart 6. Weekly Shipments of Tomatoes,* Florida and Texas, 1961 Spring Crop



*U.S.D.A. Statistical Reporting Service, Orlando, Florida

COMPARISONS OF VINE-RIPE TOMATO PLANTINGS MADE AFTER VARIOUS DATES 1960-61, 1961-62, and 1962-63 SEASONS

Winter and Spring Seasons

Vine-Ripe Tomatoes	1960-61	1961-62	1962-63
	(acres)	(acres)	(acres)
Total Planting After September 1	2790	3070	3500
Planted After November 1	580	950	1390
Planted After December 1	40	370	730
Harvest Not Started March 9*	50	560	1130
Harvest Over 2-Weeks Away, March 9*	30	390	980

* These tomatoes were either in a pre-set or set fruit but none yet in ripe stage.

WEEKLY PLANTINGS OF FLORIDA VINE-RIPE TOMATOES*
1961, 1962, 1963 SEASONS, ACRES

Planting Date		1960-1961	1961-1962	1962-1963
September	8	140	200	260
	15	570	250	290
	22	360	330	180
	29	270	190	380
October	6	350	190	180
	13	270	360	340
	25	150	240	210
	27	100	320	270
November	3	270	170	140
	10	90	140	210
	17	90	140	130
	24	90	130	280
December	1	10	40	110
	8	30	60	130
	15	-	110	30
	22	-	40	160
	29	-	40	20
January	5	-	-	-
	12	-	20	20
	19	-	60	-
	26	-	-	60
February	2	-	-	60
	9	-	-	40
		2790	3070	3500

* U.S.D.A. Statistical Reporting Service, Orlando, Florida

grower, is attempting to lengthen his season. The results indicate that he is having more success in this than are the other growers of late spring tomatoes.

It would appear that up to the present time much if not most of the increase in competition from Florida and elsewhere has been due to the improvement in transportation and in production techniques. However, research is underway to develop tomato varieties that will set and produce firm, high quality fruit under higher temperature conditions. Success in the latter is not certain but continued improvement in transportation and in production know-how will further increase the pressure of competition from the southern tomato grower.

Competing Tomato Shipping Areas

Reported shipments of tomatoes usually reach a peak in late May or early June.[1/] Florida is by far the largest shipper during March, April, and May. Mexico is the largest supplier of tomatoes in competition with Florida until about the middle of May and continues to ship some tomatoes until the first week of June. For the last week of May and throughout June, Texas becomes the largest supplier of fresh tomatoes in the U.S. market. In June and July, "other states" as a total become the major supplier of fresh tomatoes. (Chart 7)

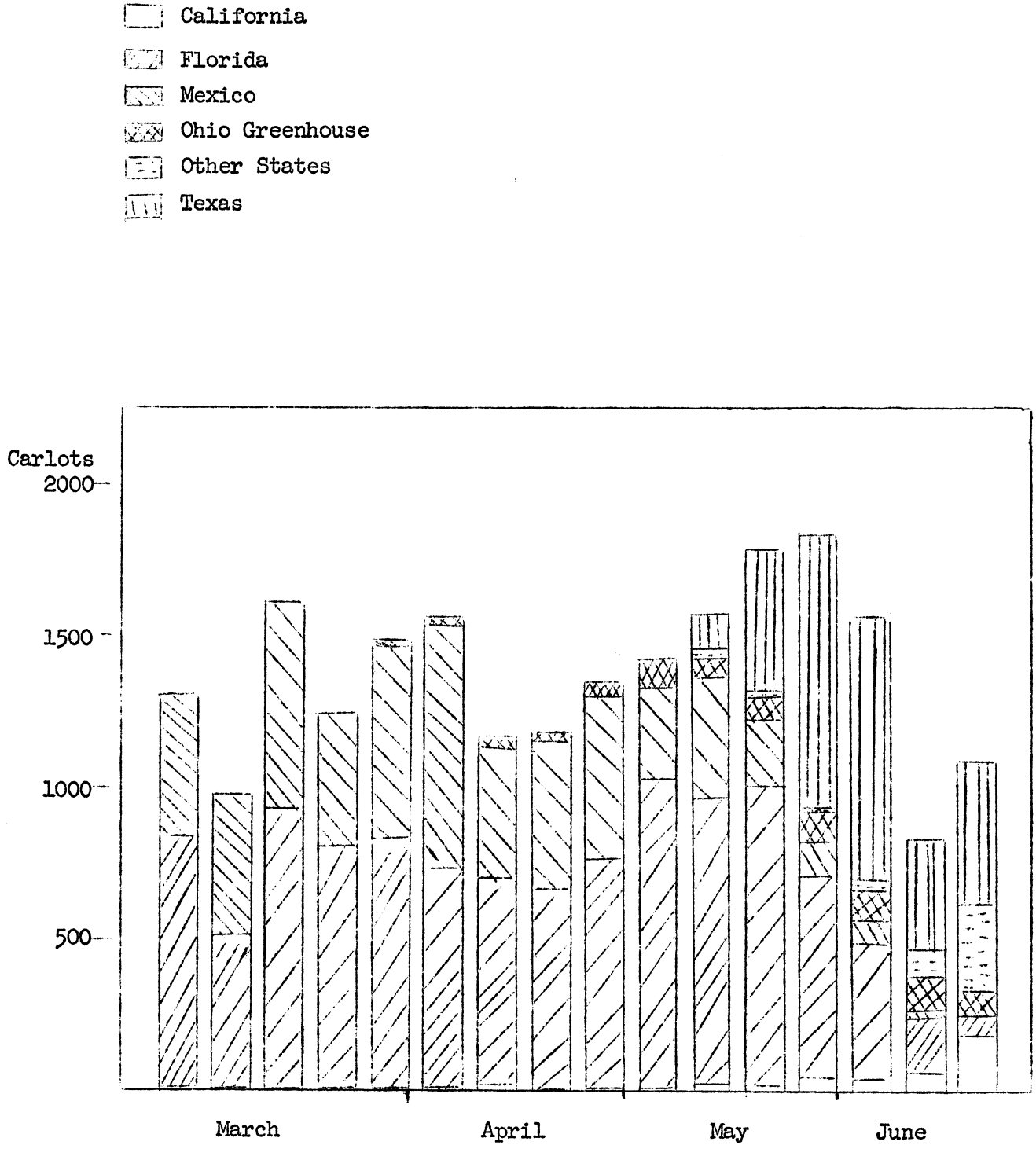
Origin of Spring Crop Fresh Tomatoes Sold In the Ohio Greenhouse Tomato Market

Greenhouse tomatoes are marketed in volume over an area covering most of the cities east of the Mississippi River and as far south as Washington,

---

[1/] It is probable that actual shipments increase still further during the summer but no accurate figures are available on shipments from local market garden areas.

Chart 7.



Weekly Shipment of Tomatoes, California Interstate, Florida, Mexico, Ohio, Other States, and Texas,* 1962 Spring Crop

*U.S.D.A. Statistical Reporting Service, Orlando, Florida

D.C. and Louisville, Kentucky. Weekly unloads of each fruit and vegetable are reported in 16 of these cities. While the data on unloads are very similar to those on shipments reported in Chart 7, they show the greater importance of Ohio as a source of tomatoes during May and June in these cities than in the U.S. as a whole. Florida, Texas, and Mexico are the major source of tomatoes although other sources become important in June and July. California becomes quite important in July. Texas appears to be more variable from year to year than Florida as a source of supplies. (Charts 8 & 9)

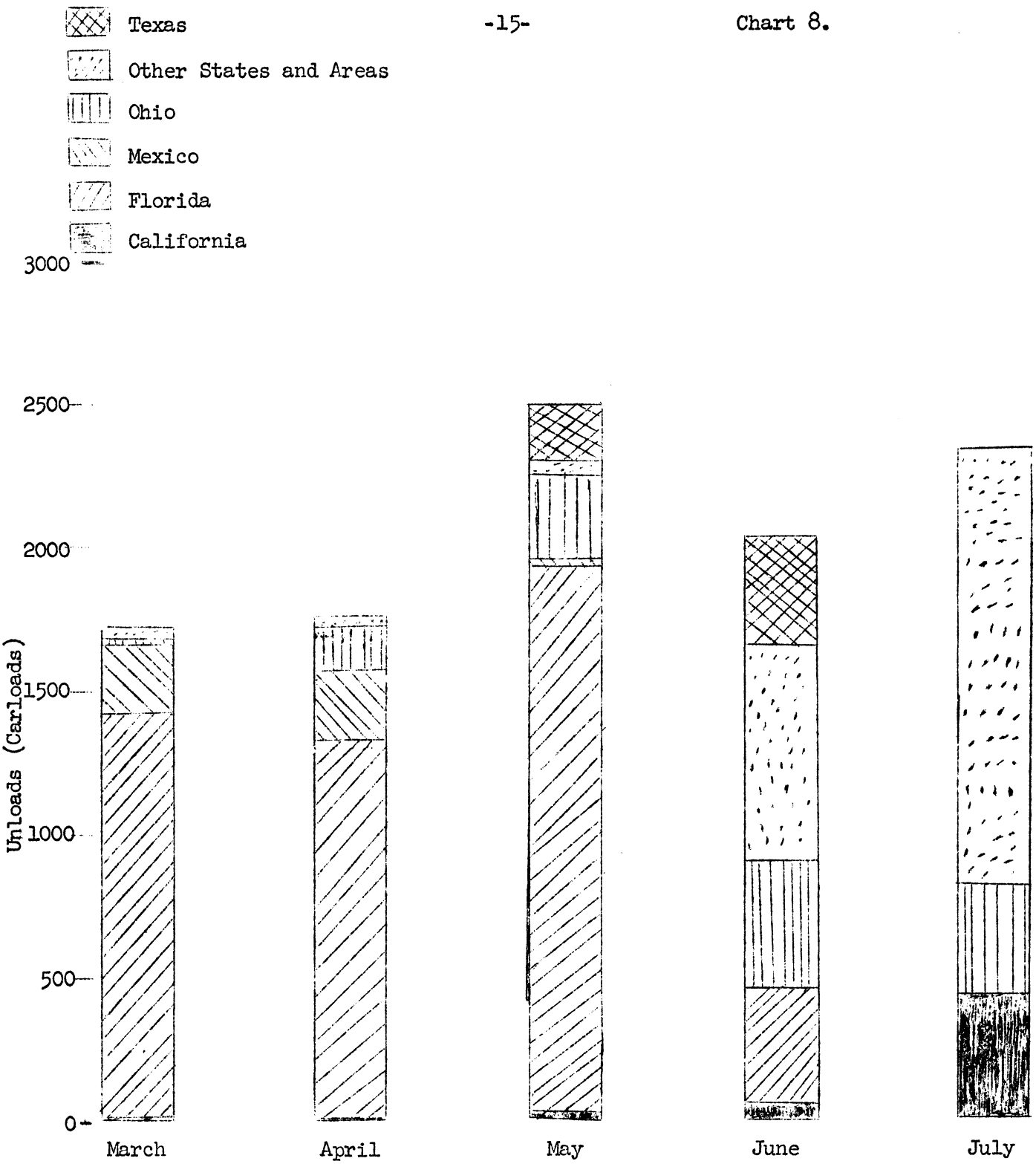
Tomato Prices

The individual greenhouse tomato producer is probably even more interested in price than is his southern competitor, since the greenhouse production area and marketing volume is less variable from year to year than is field production.

Two price changes have occurred during the past ten years although neither are effectively shown in the accompanying charts. Both are due primarily to the change in the supply of competing tomatoes. The first is the absence today of the extremely high price for the early (late March-early April) greenhouse tomatoes. The second is the lower season average price for spring and fall crops.

Before the vine-ripe tomato crop first appeared in the mid-fifties there was no high quality tomato available until the greenhouse tomato appeared each spring. The first greenhouse tomatoes each spring were eagerly sought and brought high prices. Today in tomatoes, as with sweet corn, a product that is good enough to at least take the edge off the latent demand for "good" quality fresh product is available from November to May.

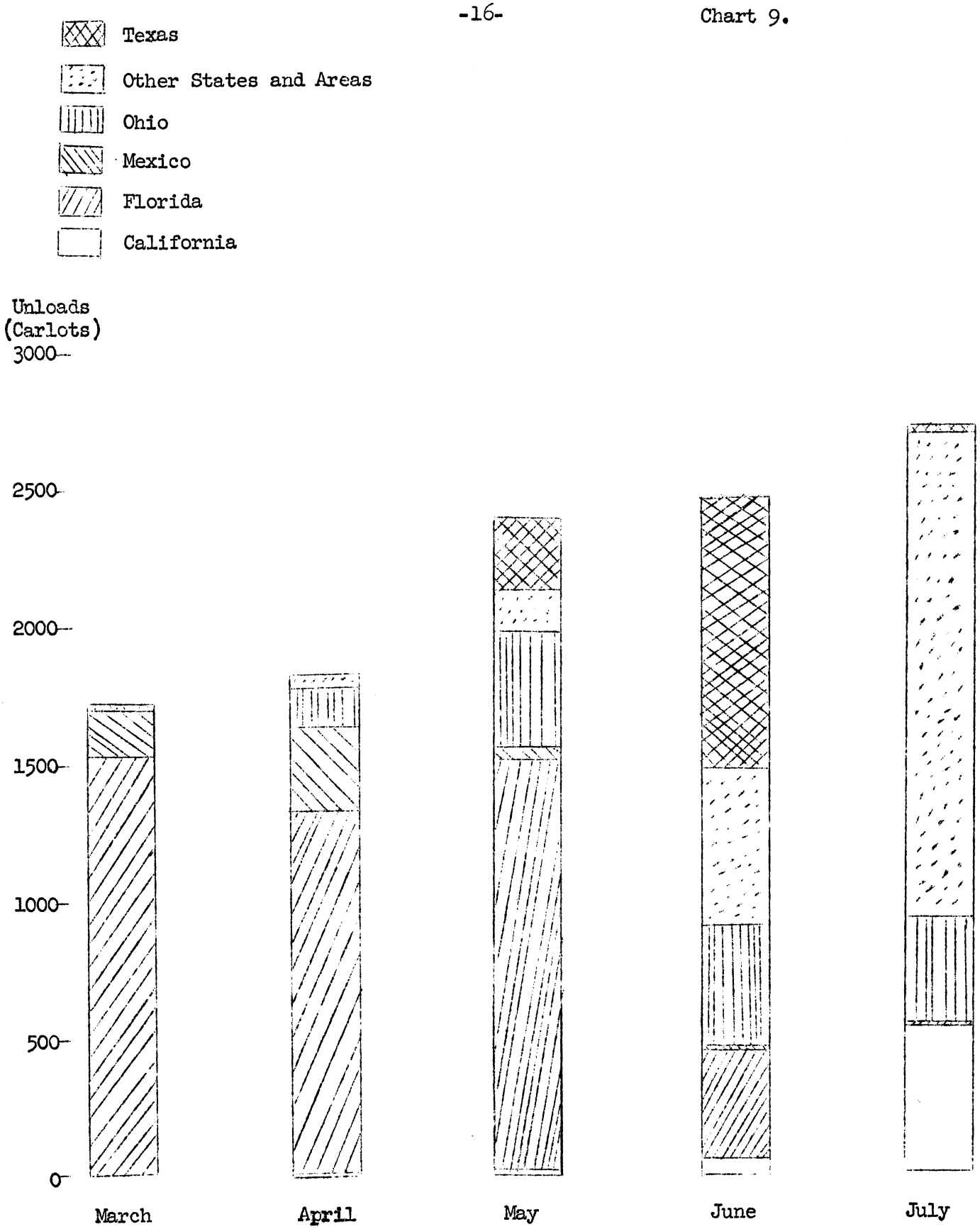
Chart 8.



Origin of Fresh Tomato Unloads in 16 Eastern and Midwestern Cities, Spring Crop 1961

Source: Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Unloads, A.M.S. No. 427, U.S.D.A.

Chart 9.



Origin of Fresh Tomato Unloads
in 16 Eastern and Midwestern Cities,
Spring Crop 1962

Source: Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Unloads, A.M.S. No. 427, U.S.D.A.

The lower season average price is in part due to the appearance of the vine-ripe product and in part due to the heavier tomato shipments, particularly from Florida and Texas during the height of the greenhouse tomato marketing season than was formerly the case.

In the charts showing tomato prices in Cleveland and Cincinnati for 1960, 1961, and 1962, several trends are apparent. (Charts 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15)

In the first place, greenhouse tomato prices generally decline by at least one dollar a basket between March 15 and June 1. In the second place, prices of tube tomatoes decline somewhat less than this amount so that prices of greenhouse are nearer to those of tube tomatoes on June 1 than on March 15. In the third place, each year since 1960, prices on vine-ripe tomatoes have been reported later during the season than was primarily the case. This usually indicates that in the opinion of the market news reporter significant volume of the product was on hand for reporting later in the season. A fourth observation is the usual increase in greenhouse tomato prices that occurs in June.

Chart 10. Prices of Fresh Tomatoes on the Cleveland Wholesale Market, March 15 - July 10, 1960

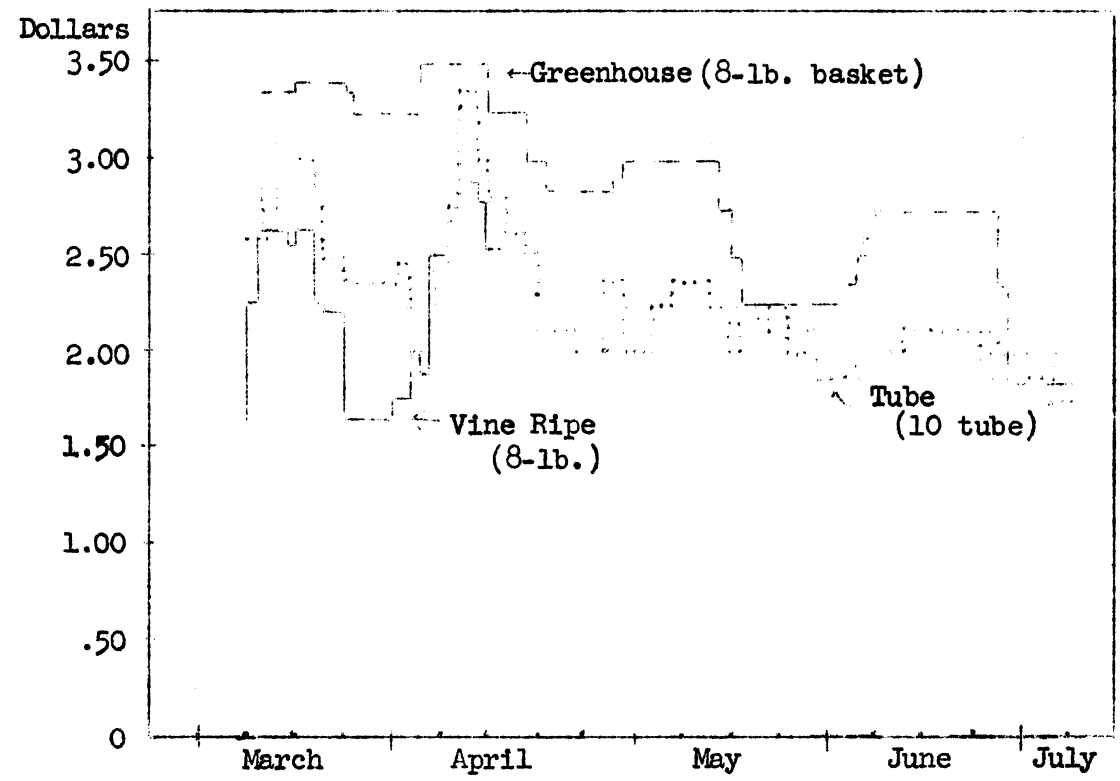


Chart 11. Prices of Fresh Tomatoes on the Cincinnati Wholesale Market, March 15 - July 10, 1960

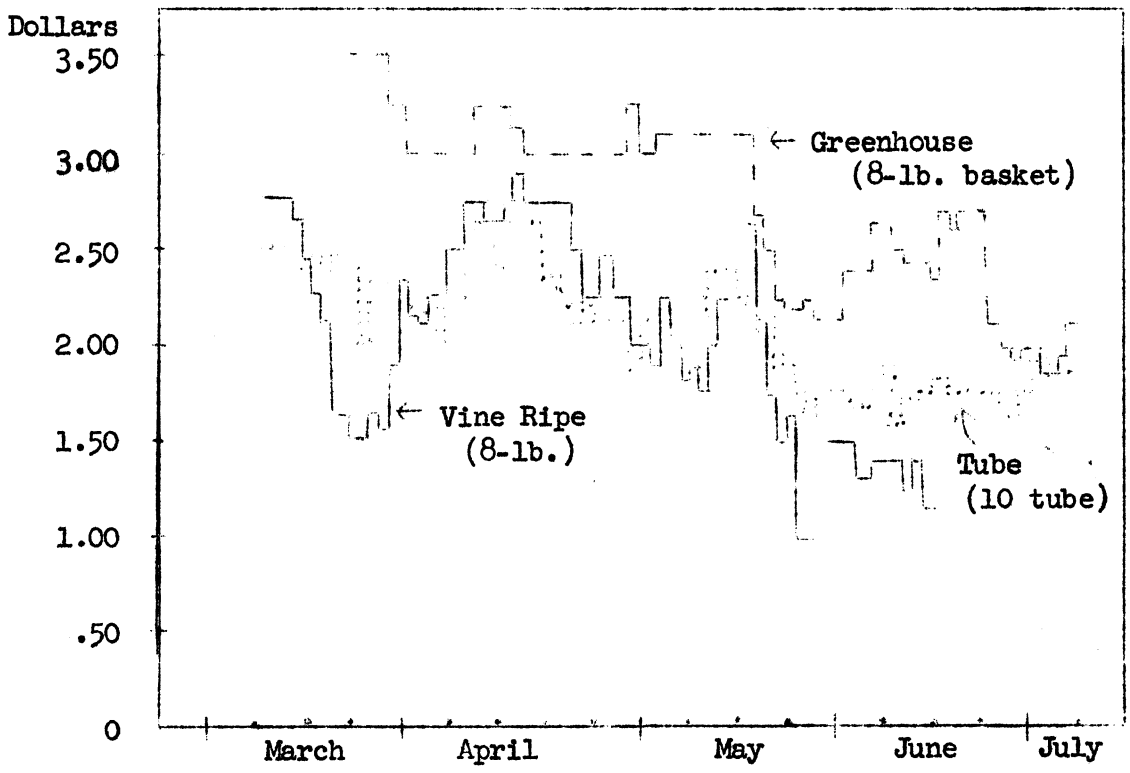


Chart 12. Prices of Fresh Tomatoes on the Cleveland Wholesale Market, March 15 - July 10, 1961

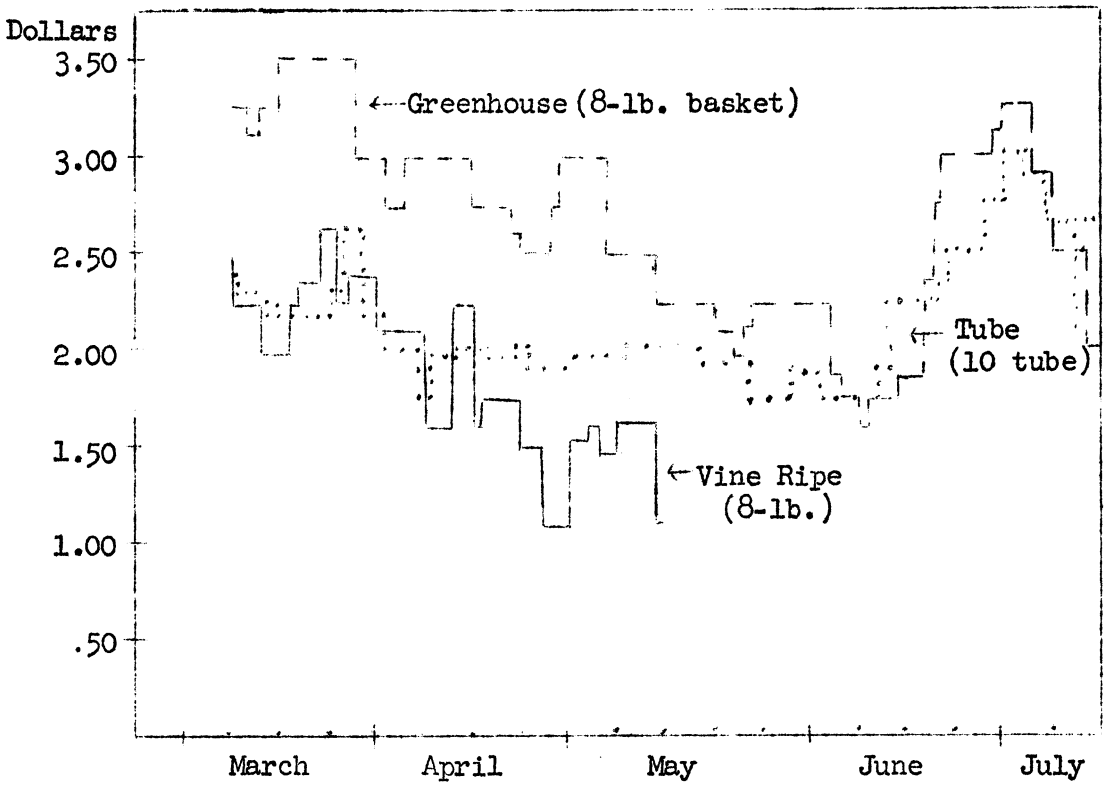


Chart 13. Prices of Fresh Tomatoes on the Cincinnati Wholesale Market, March 15 - July 10, 1961

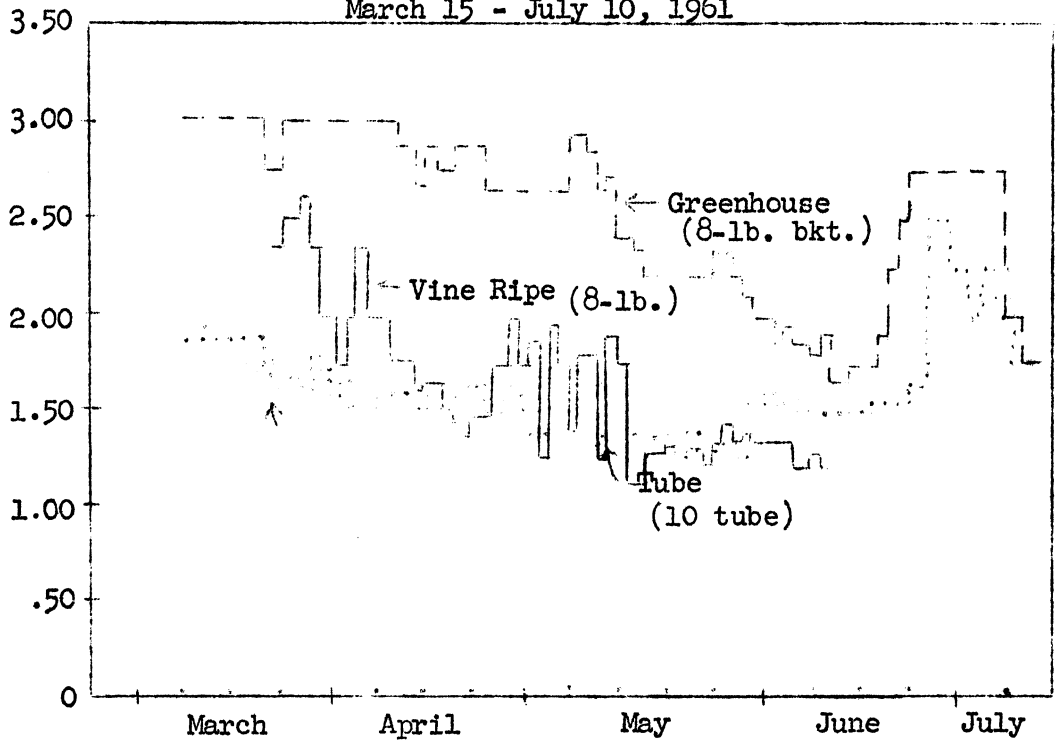


Chart 14. Prices of Fresh Tomatoes on the Cleveland Wholesale Market, March 15 - July 10, 1962

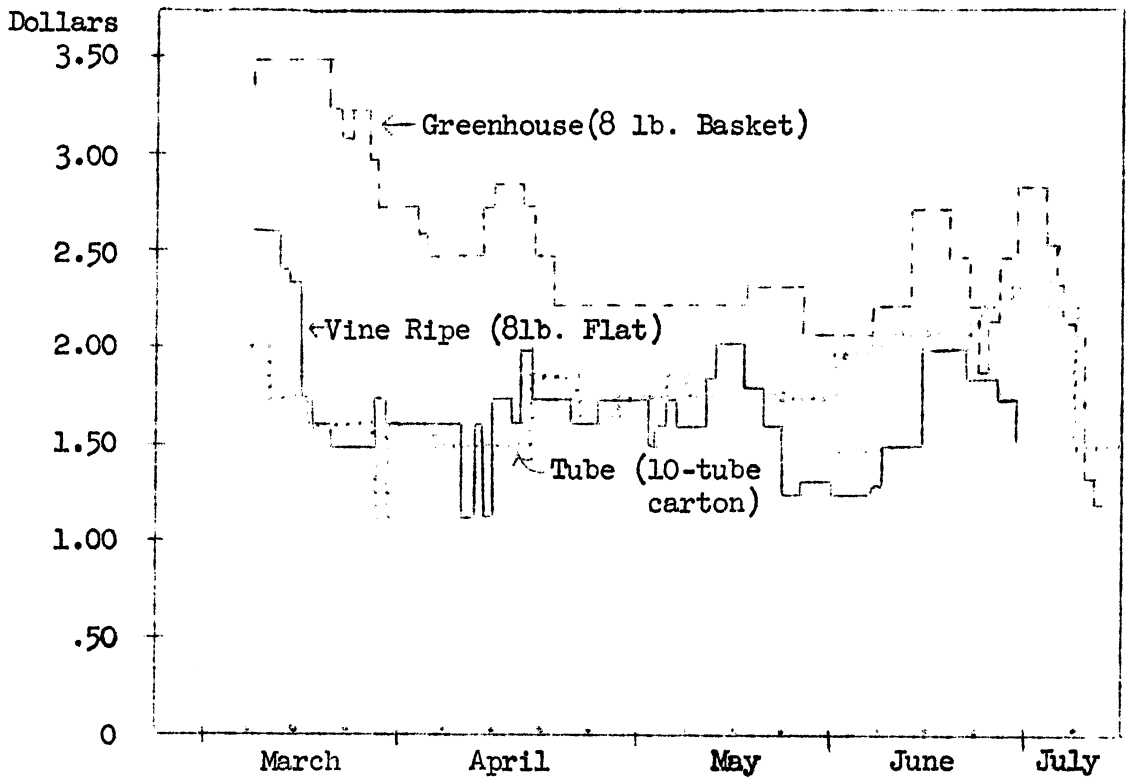


Chart 15. Prices of Fresh Tomatoes on the Cincinnati Wholesale Market, March 15 - July 10, 1962